

TITLE: Abbot Emerson Smith

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~*A man of integrity***ABBOT EMERSON SMITH**

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Anyone who knew Abbot Emerson Smith must have felt a twinge of personal sorrow at hearing of his death at the age of seventy-five in April 1983. It is hard to write about Abbot without launching into superlatives, but that would have embarrassed him; he was an exceedingly modest man. Abbot



retired from the Agency in 1971, having served for the last four years of his career as Director of the Office of National Estimates, Chairman of the Board of National Estimates, and Chairman of the Editorial Board of *Studies in Intelligence*.

Abbot was born and raised in Maine, took great pride in being a Maine-man, and exemplified some of the better qualities associated with New Englanders. As a youth he had a remarkable talent for music, playing the organ at the age of twelve or so in the Congregational Church where his father was minister, and later playing the piano on Saturday nights in the local movie house. In later years in ONE, under

his doctor's advice to take a half-hour of rest after lunch, Abbot normally stretched out on his couch to read a musical score, deriving as much pleasure from scanning Mozart or Bach as others would from a detective story. (He also was fond of mystery stories.)

Abbot attended Colby College in Waterville, Maine, studied organ at the Eastman School of Music, then went on to graduate studies in American history at Harvard. While there he learned of his selection as a Rhodes Scholar. He transferred to Oxford and attended Balliol College, where he met Kathleen Mottram, a South African scholar whom he later married, and where he earned a doctorate in history. His thesis, *Colonists in Bondage*, is still the authoritative work on indentured servitude in the American colonies. (I am told that at Princeton University Library the ten dog-eared copies of Abbot's book are in constant demand by the students.) His second scholarly work, *James Madison*, never achieved as much acclaim but is still regarded as authoritative by experts on that period.

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Abbot began a teaching career at Bard College, but after Pearl Harbor he was commissioned in the Naval Reserve and called to active duty. Following a lengthy course at Columbia's School of Military Government and Administration, Abbot was sent to the US Naval Command in London, assigned to a US Army unit, and on D-Day landed at Utah Beach to serve as civil affairs officer, first at Vaast-la-Hogue and later at Cancale. In his first experience in administering a French town, he felt unsure of himself, but was reminded by his commanding officer: "There's nothing to it. Just remember you are a US naval officer." In later years he kept a photo of himself in full naval uniform, and in times of stress, would take out the picture and mutter, "Well, what would he do now?"

After the German surrender, Abbot served on the US Control Council in Vienna, then returned to London where he was assigned to the Historical Staff of the Commander, US Naval Forces, Europe. On his return to the US he assisted Samuel Eliot Morrison in the Office of Naval History, and attained the rank of lieutenant commander.

Analyst

For a brief period he returned to college teaching, but was attracted to CIA by his wartime friend, Paul Borel. Abbot came to CIA in 1948 as an intelligence analyst, serving first in the Special Staff of ORE, the Office of Research and Evaluation.

In the autumn of 1950 in the early stages of the Korean War, General Walter Bedell Smith, the DCI, asked an aide for the latest estimate on Korea. Finding that CIA did not produce estimates, General Smith invited Professor William Langer, an OSS veteran, to come down from Harvard to organize an Office of National Estimates. Langer agreed, and persuaded an OSS colleague, Sherman Kent, to leave Yale and join him in Washington as his deputy.* Together, Langer and Kent interviewed prospective board and staff candidates, and brought into the newly formed ONE staff a number of the analysts from ORE, including Paul Borel, Ray Cline, and Abbot Smith. Sherman Kent succeeded Langer as Director of National Estimates in 1952, with Ray Sontag as deputy, and when Sontag returned to academia the following year, Abbot Smith was selected as deputy to Kent. According to Sherman Kent, when the vacancy occurred, Miss Frances Douglas, the administrative officer of ONE, and herself an OSS veteran, suggested to Kent that Abbot Smith would be a good choice for deputy. "Her suggestions were usually worth listening to, and in this case it was excellent advice," Kent recalls.

For fourteen years (1953-67) Sherman Kent and Abbot Smith worked together to build the Office of National Estimates into a highly respected, efficient producer of intelligence at the national level. They were an odd couple in temperament: Sherman, a flamboyant, outspoken, dynamic personality; Abbot, a quiet, contemplative, patient, logical gentleman "of the old

* See Harold P. Ford, "A Tribute to Sherman Kent," *Studies in Intelligence*, Fall 1980, Volume 24, Number 3.

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school." Both men were brilliant writers, with excellent education and training, and an ability to recall selectively from their reading and experience some bit of logic or historical perspective to help resolve an intelligence problem. Sherman Kent, in a conversation with the author a few weeks after Abbot's death, referred to Abbot Smith as "gentle, wise, and delightful—the fastest mind and finest drafter of intelligence papers I have even known." He said, "I loved him like a brother."

Abbot Smith was the author of the fastest and probably the shortest formal intelligence estimate ever produced. On election eve, in November 1956, as the Suez crisis was unraveling and the Hungarian uprising was in its final stages, Premier Bulganin sent to the British and French Prime Ministers identical nasty, threatening letters. In late afternoon the fact of the letters was known in CIA, but the text was not yet available. Allen Dulles had gone up to New York in order to vote the next day. Intelligence agency chiefs consulted by phone and agreed to hold a USIB (predecessor of today's NFIB) meeting that evening at 9 o'clock, to be chaired by the DDCI, General Cabell. The translated text of the letters arrived from the State Department at 8:45 p.m. Abbot Smith read the messages, jotted down on a yellow pad his impressions of their significance, and had his notes mimeographed and distributed to the assembled USIB members at 9. By the time Allan Dulles arrived by train from New York around midnight, the USIB members had agreed to an amended version of Abbot's draft. This was reviewed and approved by Dulles, typed early the next morning as a SNIE, and delivered to the prime customers at opening of business.

A former member of the Board of National Estimates recalls another coordination meeting at which community representatives were wrestling with a complicated military estimate. By 8 o'clock of a Friday evening, after a long day of haggling, the attendees were irritable, tired, and divided into two apparently irreconcilable camps. Sherman Kent, chairing the paper, stopped in mid-sentence to watch Abbot Smith at the other end of the table scribbling on his yellow pad. Conversation died away, and the others watched. When Abbot put his pencil down, Sherman said, "Read it, Abbot." Abbot slowly read off three perfect sentences. Everyone at the table gathered up papers and then filed out. Abbot's sentences did the trick. A few minutes later, a board member stopped off in Sherman's office. Sherman was leaning back in his chair with thumbs hooked in his "naked lady" suspenders. "That Abbot," he said, "if he wants my watch, he can have it."

Historian

Abbot's historical training served him well over the years, and left its mark on the estimates process. In a meeting in the late 1960s on the prospects for a civil war in Nigeria, State Department representatives were arguing that the training that the British had given the Nigerians in parliamentary government would prevent any breakdown in Nigeria's version of the Westminster model. Abbot pointed out that we had had the same training and had had a first-rate civil war.

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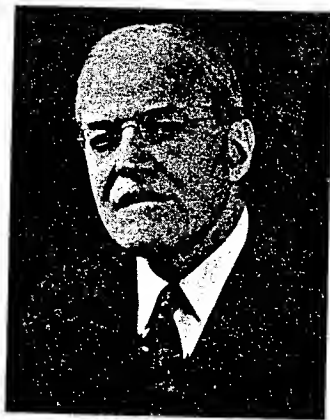
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Abbot Smith

Similarly, a gathering of community representatives in the early 1960s was addressing the prospects for the new Gaullist constitution in France. The members were approaching a consensus that, according to the principles of political science, the constitution was a hopeless mess, certain to break down quickly. Abbot suggested that it was no better nor worse than its predecessors and would last about as long. The problem was to consider how it might work in the next ten years. He knew enough about history to appreciate the element of resilience in human societies, and the willingness of people to accept almost hopeless economic conditions and tolerate idiotic forms of government.

For many years the members of the Office of National Estimates met once or twice a year with a board of consultants at a site near Princeton, New Jersey. Abbot Smith, during the years he was deputy office director, generally organized the proceedings. He wrote the invitations to the consultants by hand, and in the invitation notices to an old friend on the Princeton faculty, Abbot normally wrote in Latin (and received the reply in the same language). This was not done in a showy fashion, and I doubt if many others knew of this quaint practice. But to Abbot it was an opportunity to keep up his skills in the language of Cicero.

At the conclusion of one of the consultants' meetings, Abbot and Allen Dulles were having coffee in the lunchroom of the Trenton railway station while waiting for the train to Washington. As Abbot was paying the bill, the counterman said to him: "I know that man you are with, but I can't think of the name." Abbot said: "Yes, his name is Molotov."



Dulles



Molotov

Abbot Smith was a man of simple and frugal tastes. On the train trips to the consultants' meetings at Princeton, he always passed up the opportunity to dine on the train, stopping instead at a station lunch counter in either Washington or Trenton. His explanation was, "I'm just saving the government a little money." A former Agency official once stationed in [redacted] remembers a visit of Abbot Smith to [redacted]. The Station officer found Abbot in a dingy second-class hotel, and invited him out to his residence for a drink. No, he had had one. Dinner? No, he couldn't bear the thought of food. He had eaten something strange for lunch that had upset his stomach. "Well," said the Station officer, "come out anyhow and my wife will fix you something you

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like, no Middle East food." "Do you suppose she would have a can of Campbell's vegetable soup?" asked Abbot. As it turned out, she did, Abbot ate it, and years later was still happily reminiscing about the best meal he ever had.

Abbot was a quiet man, who, in the New England tradition, thought it unseemly to display emotion. He was too polite to become an effective bureaucrat, and hated the sort of infighting in which Sherman Kent excelled. His recreation was simple: long walks on weekends, reading or playing music, and especially reading. He re-read Gibbon during his ONE days, and after retirement, found a place on Cape Cod within walking distance of a good book store.

Craftsman

Anything Abbot wrote was beautifully crafted. Some of the substantive memoranda he produced in ONE were used by the ONE staff to show new members how the job should be done. A piece he wrote in 1963 on the fundamental problems of South Africa is as valid today as when it was written. So far as I know, there has never been a better explanation of what intelligence estimates can and cannot do than Abbot's article "On the Accuracy of National Intelligence Estimates" in Volume 13, Number 4 of *Studies in Intelligence*.

Abbot generally assumed that anyone in his office assigned to a task would do the job as well as humanly possible. If the product did not measure up to his standards, he would point out the weaknesses and suggest ways to make the draft more effective. Not for him the "there's something wrong with this paper, but I don't know what it is" approach. He had a respect for and a mastery of the English language and entertained the old-fashioned belief that English was a language whose prime quality was its clarity. One of his greatest contributions to the Agency and to the estimates process was to set a standard of style and exposition, stressing clarity, simplicity, and logical presentation.

This little memorial article can hardly do justice to the strength of character, the integrity, the extraordinary talents and skills, and unfailing kindness of Abbot Smith. Those who served with or under Abbot loved and respected him. In the age of the common man, Abbot Smith was a most uncommon man.

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